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ABSTRACT

This ethnography explores the leadership qualities of a public school district media director, the person who "orchestrates" the use of technology. Using observation, interviews, and artifact analysis, the following questions were investigated: (1) What are the beliefs and values which underlie this media director's decisions?; (2) What are the recurring events and practices of the media director?; (3) What are the relationships a media director must cultivate?; (4) What are the day-to-day encounters of a media director?; and (5) What are the leadership qualities of this media director? Data were analyzed and categorized into issues which describe the inter-relatedness of theory and the decision-making and actions of the media director. The themes of the discussion are: "Leadership: Lead, Follow, or Please Retire!" and "Communication: The Way I Hear It." (Contains 11 references.) (MAS)

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Title:

A Media Director and His Leadership: An Ethnographic Pilot Study

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Ethnography

An ethnography can be defined as an in-depth analytical description of an intact cultural scene. This research observes human behavior in its natural setting (holistic inquiry carried out in a natural setting) over a period of time. Naturalistic perspective emphasize humans as the primary data gathering instrument and the use of triangulated data-gathering procedures (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Human observation is flexible and can adapt to a complex situation as it evolves. In addition, human observation allows for the identification of biases that result from interactions and value differences between the "instrument" and the subject (Borg, 1989). To help reduce biases, researchers
should use triangulation of data. Triangulation is the process of collecting and examining related documents to serve as crossreferences to observed data. Researchers using naturalistic inquiry purposely select their subject/group or setting. By purposeful selection, a qualitative researcher will be more likely to uncover the full array of "multiple realities" relevant to an inquiry. The focus of the ethnographer's inquiry is on the mundane, everyday practices of people. The paramount objective of qualitative research is understanding rather than generalizing or identifying cause and effect (Whitt, 1991).

Pilot Study

Research Design

This study was undertaken to explore the leadership qualities of a district media director. The school district, Byrdsville Public School District or BPS as school personnel referred to it (This is a pseudonym for the actual school district for confidentiality.), is a mid-sized school district with 26 school buildings and approximately 13,000 students. Using ethnographic research methods, the following questions were investigated:

What are the beliefs and values which underlies this media director's decisions?
What are the recurring events and practices of the media director?
What are the relationships that media director must cultivate?
What are the day-to-day encounters of a media director?
What are the leadership qualities of this media director?

The significance of this study revolves around the lack of any research on media directors. Research has been typically focused on either administrators (superintendents or principals) or teachers.

Data for this study were obtained through observation, interviews, and artifact analysis. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and all data presented in this study are designed to protect their anonymity.

Roles and Experiences of Investigator

During this study, I became a participant observer, an intern to the media director. My internship was contracted as one day a week, Tuesday, for two semesters so I could observe a full school year cycle. In addition, I attended special events I was invited to. By being actively involved in the situation being observed, insights and interpersonal relationships developed which would have been virtually impossible to achieve through any other method. This role, participant observer, requires the researcher to come to the situation as a learner and to try, at least partially, to be socialized into the group. The socialization process allows the researcher to experience the physical, relational, and emotional realities of the setting as it exists for the members (Dobbert, 1984).

In the beginning as a participant observer, Dobbert (1984) recommends the researcher keep in the background, keep quiet, watch, and listen. In addition, the researcher should be maintaining a friendly and willing stance, offering to assist with single or onerous tasks, accepting invitations and assistance gratefully, asking questions when you don't think it would be bothersome, and trying to learn the language of the group (Dobbert, 1984).

Wolcott (1988) warns that taking a more active role than the "observer" has costs attached; research efforts are sometimes secondary to the participation. However, the benefits of being a participant-observer includes: 1) quality of direct on-site observation; with the participant, long term observation and group acceptance is more likely to occur; 2) freedom of access; more documents and subjects are available to the researcher when she or he is a "part" of the group; 3) intensity of observation; by being in the "loop" there are typically more hours of observation, increasing the chances of observing the common and the exceptional; and 4) data sampling; by being a participant, the researcher may be included in meetings (formal and informal) and be included in mailings that she or he would not have known about otherwise (Borg, 1989).

Data Collection Methods

"Ethnographers consider data to be potentially verifiable information obtained from the environment. The problem of data collection, then, consists of defining appropriate information and developing strategies for obtaining it" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 107). The most common data collection includes observation, interviewing, researcher-designed instruments, and content analysis of human artifacts (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Interactions and observations were the primary sources for the field notes in this study. Within these activities are discussions relative to the media director's position. With each observation I became more at ease discriminating between what should and should not be recorded, knowing what I left out shaped my data as certainly as that which I included. During observations I would jot down notes and quotes. Later, these would be rewritten, expanding my description of the experience.

In addition to the field notes, informal interviews were conducted with the media director, secretaries, media specialists, and principals. I used interviewing methods to "get at" the reasons for certain actions I had observed or "get to" the individual's opinion, background, and experiences. These interviews ensured a variety of perspectives and consistency of data.

Correspondence or documents relating to the media director were collected in efforts to cross-reference to the observed data. These artifacts were typical correspondence of the media director, letters and memos that were sent within and outside of the district. In addition, I collected original material Pete created for specific groups (media specialists, secretaries, district coordinators, district technology group). This process allowed for triangulation and a "trustworthiness" of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Respondents

Following Lincoln & Guba's (1985) suggestion, purposeful sampling was employed in order to obtain as much information as possible and to get the maximum variation in sampling. Further, the intended purpose of data collection was not to generate enough data to be able to draw conclusions or generalizations but to be able to provide results with the uniqueness of the subject or phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All respondents in this pilot study were employed by Byrdsville Public School District. Every respondent was told they would have anonymity and all information would be confidential. Furthermore, each respondent was given a pseudonym either by choosing it herself/himself or one was provided by the researcher in order to maintain confidentiality. Respondents who volunteered to be observed and to interviews included:

Media director: Dr. Pete Young
Microcomputer coordinator: Bob
Media specialists: Sharon, Laura, Brenda
Principal: Paul
Secretaries: Nancy, Elizabeth, Frances, Susan

In addition, there were many individuals who were a part of the project because of their interactions with Pete. I was introduced as "his intern who is learning how a media program works."

Analysis

Data does not answer research questions; it must be analyzed before a scientific perspective can be offered. Lincoln & Guba (1985) promote the induction and constant comparison method of data analysis. Dobbert's (1984) description of Darwinian natural history method follows this same research strategy. The method includes five steps and is a spiral process. The five steps are: 1) careful observation, 2) have a conceptual scheme into which to try and fit the data (this occurs with step 1), 3) change the concepts, assumptions, or hypotheses to accommodate the facts (this occurs after step 1), 4) group facts by categories and arrive at conclusions by explaining the relationships or processes that create the differences and similarities expressed in the categories (this occurs with step 3), and 5) turn to a new observation directed by the discoveries stemming from the analytic process as carried out through the previous four steps (Dobbert, 1984).

Data were analyzed and categorized into issues which describe the inter-relatedness of theory and the decision making / actions of the media director. The themes of the study are presented in the following two sections: 1) Leadership: Lead, Follow, or Please Retire!, 2) Communication: The Way I Hear It.

Literature Review: Leadership

Leadership is a process whereby one person exerts social influence over the members of the group. A leader is a person with power over others who exercises this power for the purpose of influencing their

behavior (Heller, Van Till & Zurcher, 1986). Today, leaders are challenged as they find themselves working with more individuals who are different from themselves and they must bridge the empathy gap. A leader's creativity must be used when working with the resources of their diverse team members and avoid neglecting the team members' important skills and competencies.

Educational technology leadership shares much with the research on leadership. However, the specific knowledge and abilities connected with technology provides for unique considerations. An analysis of the effectiveness of technology in education suggests that the manner in which technology is implemented is more important than any intrinsic characteristics of the technology (Kearsley & Lynch, 1992). Leadership plays a very critical role in the process of the adoption of technology.

Technology leaders today are expected to possess strong visionary skills, have excellent interpersonal and communication skills, as well as a measure of technical competence in addition to the "basic leadership" capabilities (Ray, 1992). To be successful, these leaders must be successful in their abilities to articulate and influence cultural norms and values; they are expected to shape the culture of the school by creating a new vision that members can believe in and act upon (Kearsley & Lynch, 1992).

Electronic technology has been viewed as a radical departure from the traditional educational technologies (books, chalkboards, duplicating machines, teaching systems, ect.). The new technology has only been widely available or affordable since the mid 1980's. Therefore, the majority of teachers did not have the opportunity to practice with electronic technology during their preprofessional training. Teachers are typically insecure and unskilled in regards to using technology in their classroom and mandates to use technology by administrators only leave them frustrated and floundering

The failure of any technology can result for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons can include lack of teacher training, lack of appropriate materials/equipment, poorly conceived implementation plans, unrealistic goals/expectations, or insufficient funding. Most of these pitfalls can be corrected with good technological leadership. Technology leaders must identify educational problems which technology can solve and build theoretical, political, and financial support structures to ensure success (Kearsley & Lynch, 1992).

Lead, Follow, or Please Retire

The first time I was in Pete's office, was to discuss my internship with him. Pete's office is located in an old brick school building called Smith by the district. Smith is located in the center of the city and is surrounded by federal assistance housing projects. The east side of Smith is its architectural front and has a large green yard between it and a major street. The drive entrance is located behind the building with a small paved parking lot at the south end of the building and a six foot fence on the perimeter of the property. The doors coming into the building from the parking lot are the doors used primarily by the Instructional Materials Services (IMS) department. The other half of the building is occupied by the alternative high school. A high school for students who could or would not "fit" into the district's traditional high schools.

Upon entering from the parking lot there is a hundred yard walk down a dimly light hallway filled with furniture and/or equipment, depending of the current activities of IMS, to Pete's office. His office reflects its age by the height of the ceiling, the light fixtures, exposed plumbing, and dilapidated walls. The rectangular office is painted yellow. Yellow is considered a positive, warm color; it is also the color disliked by the most people (Raines, 1989). With his desk facing the entrance of the office, there are four, six foot high windows behind him that create a halo effect with the afternoon sunshine. A round table and four chairs occupy the front of the office.

A man of middle years, athletic build, blond hair, blue eyes, and a smile met me. Pete was on his was across the hall to talk to one of four secretaries who work at IMS. "Go on in and have a seat, I'll be with you in a sec" and Pete was off leaving me to ponder what I was volunteering for.

Pete's leadership style is participatory. Sharon, a media specialist, summed it up this way when we were setting up a new media center, "People respect Pete because there isn't anything he won't do. Today for example he's helping put up shelves and shelving books. You don't find many administrators willing to do that." When ask about what he expects from employees, Pete responded, "I try to be a model in my work. I model what I want them to be doing for me [library and technology related] . . . I don't expect anything more from them than I do from myself."

Pete describes his position in the following way, "I'm a facilitator. I get people together in order to make things happen. I help solve problems. I look ahead to our needs." He is described by most all of the elementary media specialists as a "good leader" (some say boss) and those answering always added "I like Pete." What is a good leader / boss? To the media specialists I spoke with it means someone they

can count on when they are in a pinch, someone to help them keep up in their profession, someone to brainstorm with, someone to help provide direction, and someone to talk things over with.

The media specialists like Pete as a person, but as Heller, Van Til, & Zurcher (1986) points out a leader's "authority must be defined in terms of the follower's acceptance of the legitimacy of the influence attempt" (p. 6). From conversations with the media specialists, the following concerns were voiced. "He's always so busy. I don't call him anymore unless it's a real problem." "Pete has been an administrator for so long he doesn't really know what's happening in the schools, or what we really do." "I think Pete has gotten his head bumped once too often and has pulled back we don't try enough different ways or things anymore." Nested within these comments are their concerns regarding Pete's leadership.

"Leader and follower must be united by common goals and aspirations and by a will to lead, on one side, and a will to follow on the other. The leader must be a member of the group, and must share its norms, its objectives, and its aspirations" (Heller, Van Til, & Zurcher, 1986, p.6). He is described by most all of the elementary media specialists as a "good leader." However, Pete's relationship with the secondary media specialists is very different.

The secondary media specialists are not willing followers of Pete. For example, Laura did not view Pete as her supervisor, "He is a coordinator and a facilitator for the secondary people. My supervisor and boss is my principal." Pete believes he is more than what she described but remains optimistic, "Remember, they didn't have anyone in my position before I came on board [as director]. So for some of those people it has been a real adjustment [to view him as a leader and not a member]. . . . That will change. You evolve. Some of those people will retire and you hire others to fit more in the niche." Pete's philosophy coincides with Heller, Van Til, & Zurcher's postulate (1986, p. 254), "Good leadership enhances followers, just as good followership enhances leaders." By attempting to hire personnel in line with his values and beliefs, Pete is strengthening his position and programs within the district.

Most days meetings take up 70 percent of Pete's day. He meets with "his boss and his boss' boss," with principals, with vendors, with media specialists, with coordinators, with teachers, with University representatives, with partners in education representatives, with parents, with students, and with a variety of "outsiders" who are interested in BPS' technology. "My job is meetings!" Pete proclaimed one day after an unusually long meeting.

Meetings are bureaucratic by nature, but there is no way around them in any social structure. However, Pete attends meetings with the common good of the district at the top of his agenda. He goes into the meetings with the plan to do what is best for the district or department based on what the students of the district need or deserve. Pete feels he has a stake in the educational process as he has two daughters in the district. Before he makes any decision or votes on any action, Pete stated he asks himself "How will this help the students, the district?

Pete's technology leadership is on cue with the literature regarding his creativity, his technical know how, and his visionary focus for the district (Kearsley & Lynch, 1992). A result of Pete's visionary skills is now tangible in all buildings. He believed card catalogs were obsolete and should be replaced with automation. Every media center in the district has an automated card catalog for students and faculty. The students and faculty I observed were very comfortable with the technology and the specialists say the students use it more than they ever did the card catalogs. In addition, the specialist state students are finding and using more resources for their classroom reports. Another visionary resource that is visible in all of the schools is CD-ROM workstations. Pete believes students will be required to remember less facts but to know were to find the key-information they need just as adults are now doing in the workplace. These are not truly revolutionary ideas because these resources have been available to the adult population for some time, but are an "evolution" in order to keep up with the outside world. BPS is one of the few school districts that has put these resources into all buildings, not just magnet schools.

Literature Review: Communication

Each person's life is lived as a series of conversations. Tannen (1990) states men's conversational style reflects their attitudes regarding life; it is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure. Conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can. Men's conversations are efforts to protect themselves from others' attempt to put them down and push them around.

Like men, women's conversational style reflect their own attitude towards life; it is a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation. Conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus (Tannen, 1990). Women attempt to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away.

Each style is valid on its own terms, misunderstandings arise because the styles are different. We all want, above all, to be heard, but not merely to be heard. We want to be understood, heard for what we think we are saying and for what we know we meant. Women and men are both often frustrated by other's way of responding to their expression of troubles.

Many men see themselves as problem solvers and a complaint or trouble is a challenge to their ablity to find a solution. If women resent men's tendency to offer solutions to problems, men complain about women's refusal to take action to solve problems they complain about. Many women who habitually report problems at work or in friendships, the message is not one of complaint but is a bid for an expression of understanding - we are the same, you are not alone (Tannen, 1990).

The Way I Hear It

Deborah Tannen (1990) states women and men have characteristically different conversational styles and feels that gender differences account for these contrasting styles. At all ages, females are more likely to phrase their preferences as suggestions, appearing to give others options in deciding what to do. In addition, women try to influence others by making polite suggestions. Men use more direct commands in most all situations (Tannen, 1990). It is these differences in styles that give rise to many female/male conflicts. People with direct styles of conversation, typically men, perceive indirect requests, typically women, as manipulative or whiny.

The direct conversation style is very evident with Pete in all methods of communication. Pete is brief and direct with his conversations, having few non-business conversations. For meetings he is responsible for running, Pete always has a typed outline to hand out to the members and he follows it very closely. Pete states he has to follow agendas in order to keep meetings on track and on time. Many times Pete has meetings back to back and can not afford time over runs.

In professional phone conversations Pete is very consistent in his delivery, he introduces himself (Hello, this is Pete Young-he will add the Dr. title when dealing with people outside of the district) and follows with "I'm calling about . . . ." He will, after the business has been conducted and depending on his schedule, make small talk for a few minutes with the person on the other end of the line. He concludes his conversations with "Well-thanks a lot. Bye."

In conversations with media specialists regarding the quality of their communication with Pete I was told he was a "very good listener, most of the time." However, one specialist added the following: "He is a male boss and he doesn't understand where we're coming from (female perspective). He doesn't deal well with the whiners."

Pete's main complaint regarding other district personnel, including several of the media specialists (all media specialists were female), was their socializing, "They're always entertaining someone." Tannen (1990) explains women mix business and personal talk to establish a comfortable working relationship and are thus viewed as socializing by those with the direct approach. Women believe the personal talk makes it possible for them to conduct their business successfully and efficiently (Tannen, 1990).

Indirect methods of communication that act to nurture relationships are often viewed as socializing and therefore those individuals are perceived as not doing their job or as not taking their job seriously by people who use the direct method. An example of communication methods creating incorrect assumptions about another individual involves Laura, a secondary media specialist and Pete. I observed Laura giving a tour to visitors from another school district. She showed them around the media center at the school she was employed at, pointed out the various technologies available and the reasons the district supported those technologies in the schools. Laura addressed their questions regarding all aspects of technology used and those she could not answer encouraged them to call and talk with Pete. She was an excellent ambassador for the district and for the use of technology in school media centers. However, Pete perceives Laura as a socialite and as someone who "just sits in her office waiting to retire."

Observations

A media director should be an administrative position who orchestrates the use of technology within the school district. The duties and responsibilities of the media director evolve as the district's climate and resources do. Regarding his own definition of his position, Pete fluctuates. For example, when asked what it is he does, the first descriptor Pete uses is facilitator, yet, he is frustrated by the secondary media specialists for viewing him in this light.

Pete is a leader, promoted from the ranks of media specialists. However, his administrative duties have caused him some "followship" difficulties and he has opted to "wait them [media specialists] out." A leader's legitimacy is defined by the followers' acceptance of him as a leader and of him as a part of the

group. As Pete waits for his position to become legitimate, he becomes less a member of the group he leads.

As director, Pete must have effective communication skills. However without conscientiously realizing it, gender has played a part in his attitude and dealings with several of the media specialists. Pete uses the direct method of communication, which is typical of men. Most of the medial specialists used the indirect approach, which is typical of women. Pete's perceptions of many of the media specialists as "socialites" and "time wasters" are a direct result of the two modes of communications.

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